

Project Update: November 2000

For the last 3 months I have been able to get some interesting data on the diet and movement behaviour of a clan of brown hyaenas located in the Eastern portion of the Makgadikgadi Salt Pans. The clan's territory includes a portion of the Makgadikgadi National Park and also areas to the East of the park where local village people live and farm cattle and other livestock.

I am studying the diet of brown hyaenas within a particular clan in an attempt to determine what proportion of their food is obtained from livestock. I am collecting data that should cast light on issues such as what and how much food is obtained by the brown hyaenas through the presence of humans in the area, and whether humans persecute brown hyaenas by hunting, trapping or poisoning them

I am using 3 primary methods for gathering data- faecal analysis, examination of food remains found at the den site and direct observation of collared individuals feeding patterns and behaviour. Initial analysis of faecal samples from clan members has indicated the expected wide variety of food sources. So far I have collared one clan member, a 24-month sub-adult male brown hyaena whom I have called "Bom". At the moment I am still getting him habituated to me following him at night on my quad bike. I have obtained movement data and I am establishing his territory/ home range and prime feeding areas. These include traditional cattle post zones and so far on 40% of observed occasions he has slept in holes that are only 1.5 km from a cattle post. The utilisation of aardvark holes as a resting point during the day has not been recorded in other studies of brown hyaena. I hope to have habituated "Bom" to me following him soon and also to get several other clan members collared within the next month.

Unfortunately a female brown hyaena was recently snared and as a consequence run over by a car. The active setting of traps and snaring brown hyaenas is common within the Makgadikgadi. I hope to spend more time discussing these issues with village people over the next few months as the motivation for these killings is often in the mistaken belief that brown hyaenas frequently hunt livestock.